DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 368 CS 502 286

AUTHOR Higashi, Sumiko
TITLE Cinderella vs Statistics: The Silent Movie Heroine as a Jazz Age Working Girl.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 22p.; Study prepared at the State University of New York College at Brockport

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Characterization; *Film Criticism; Film Industry; *Films; Mass Media; Sex Role; *Sex Stereotypes; Womens Studies; *Working Women

ABSTRACT

The portrayal of the working girl in the silent films of the 1920s ignored the fact that in reality women worked to help support their families, to be financially independent, or to supplement their family's income. A study of movie heroines from that era reveals that these characterizations reinforce the image of the traditionally dependent woman in that these women worked only until marriage; appeared sweet, innocent, and submissive; searched openly and often aggressively for a rich husband; and were often incompetent in coping with their personal and professional problems. When female characters were presented as strong, independent, or sexually frank, their rebelliousness led to marriage with dull and conventional companions and to maintenance of the status quo. The few movies that did portray successful professional women presented the heroine as mannish and out of touch with her own feelings. The two exceptions to sex-typed roles for women occurred in movies produced by women and based on books that were written by women. Even the public lives of the female movie stars of the 1920s reinforced tradition in that their public image was often frivolous, sexy, and helpless, while in reality, many were successful business professionals. (MAI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sumiko Higashi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED162368

Sumiko Higashi
SUNY College at Brockport
Women's Studies -- History

CINDERELLA VS STATISTICS

THE SILENT MOVIE HEROINE AS A JAZZ AGE WORKING GIRL

The role of popular culture in reflecting or influencing the American woman's changing socio-economic status and society's consequent image of her has been a subject of increasing study in interdisciplinary approaches to women's history.[1] Any consideration of twentieth century prescriptions of femininity must of necessity include a focus upon the movies.[2] Underlying such an approach is the premise that a circular relationship, however difficult and complex to gauge, exists between film and society. Just as movie production itself is tied precariously to the economics of the profit motive, so the content of film both shapes and reflects the social and cultural milieu. As part of a mass communications system, the movies have recorded, interpreted, and distorted female behavioral norms and expectations for a wide audience of passive spectators. Without doubt, movies have had an immense impact upon women's self-image, the nature of their relationship to men, and generally their status and function in society.

A fruitful period of investigation both in terms of cultural images of women and the growth of the motion picture industry is the twenties. By coincidence the Jazz Age, a decade characterized by a revolution in manners and morals, was also the era of silent film. And it was during the twenties that movie production became the country's fourth largest business with an investment totaling $1,500,000,000, an output yielding 90 per cent of the world's film, and a weekly audience numbering between 90 and 100 million spectators.[3] Social observers have often speculated about the role of the movies in the so-

CS502286

called Jazz Age revolt in manners and morals and in influencing consumption habits, two not unrelated phenomena in a decade labeled hedonistic.[4] On screen a partial reflection of these developments was the emergence of the silent movie heroine as working girl, a female who achieved some degree of independence because her labor was in demand in a postwar economy. Significantly, the working girl heroine became popular during a period when the United States entered an economic phase of high mass consumption and embraced what Malcolm Cowley described as "the consumption ethic."

The characterization of the movie heroine as working girl did reflect certain employment trends for women in the teens and twenties. Statistics indicate that increasing numbers of women were crowding the job market: between 1910 and 1930 their working numbers doubled and by the end of the twenties they comprised 21.9 per cent of the labor force. Since employment figures for women have steadily risen despite the Depression and massive layoffs following World War II, a more important phenomenon may have been the pattern of female employment which emerged during the teens and twenties. Figures show a decline for women employed in agriculture and remain relatively constant for those in manufacturing. But statistics for women working in areas such as transportation (usually as telephone operators), trade (generally as sales clerks), domestic and personal services (especially as laundresses and servants), and the professions (mostly as teachers and nurses) show an increase. The most dramatic increase was in the clerical field where figures more than tripled.[5] Women workers in a consumer economy were increasingly drawn and locked into job categories today labeled as pink collar. Very significant is the fact that this pattern of employment for women has persisted despite the emergency requirements of World War II, which resulted in a temporary

Rosie the riveter ideal, and present day efforts at affirmative action.

Although the pin-money hypothesis about working wives is still voiced, the fact that married women outnumbered single women as recruits to the labor force between 1910 and 1930 suggests that women's earnings, though roughly 45 per cent less than men's, were necessary in achieving the standard of living maintained by their families. But despite the concern that social observers voiced about the problem of child care, married women who worked outside the home received little if any institutional support to cope with domestic responsibilities.[6] The working wife and mother was and remains penalized by a form of double duty which also prevented her from competing in the job market on an equal basis. As for single women, they too contributed to the maintenance of households. According to the Women's Bureau, 90.7 per cent of unmarried women contributed all or a significant portion of their income to the support of their families.[7] During the early decades of the twentieth century then, growing numbers of women, both married and single, were employed outside the home. Economic necessity was a basic motivation, the job pink collar, and the setting an increasingly urban and consumer-oriented economy.

The portrayal of the working girl in silent films usually ignored the fact of single women contributing to the support of their families or the need of women to continue employment after marriage. Predictably, the daily routine of women who worked out of economic necessity was relegated to yet another world beyond the silver screen. The depiction of the work experience of the silent movie heroine--not to mention the length of the film--lasted only until her wedding day. And her employment served a purpose secondary to earning a living, for she usually met her future husband while on the job.

Should Prince Charming chance to the son of a millionaire, that fortuitous circumstance obviated the necessity for clerking at Macy's once the honeymoon was over. Usually the silent screen working girl married and stepped into a cozy, rose-covered cottage or better still, a palatial mansion.

Silent movie stars cast as working girls found themselves in an assortment of jobs, most of them rendered true to life. Gloria Swanson portrays a bargain basement salesgirl in Manhandled (1924), a waitress in Stage Struck (1925), and a chorus girl in Fine Manners (1926). Evelyn Brent and Louise Brooks as sisters are employed in a department store in Love 'em and Leave 'em (1926). As Irene (1926), Colleen Moore demonstrates beds in a display window, delivers merchandise, and enters a modeling career through the intervention of a suitor. In another feature, Orchids and Ermine (1926), she operates the switchboard of a Fifth Avenue hotel. Attempting to escape her popular little girl roles, Mary Pickford plays a five-and-dime stock clerk in My Best Girl (1927). Clara Bow in a film which would dub her the "It Girl" (1927) sells lingerie, while in an earlier picture, Mantrap (1926), she is a barber shop manicurist. A Frank Capra silent titled That Certain Thing (1928) features Viola Dana as a cigar counter salesgirl who later runs a successful box-lunch business. And in a series of Hollywood movies about Holllywood, working women aspired to that most spectacular success of all, stardom. Beauty contestant Mabel Normand arrives starry-eyed at a movie studio in The Extra Girl (1923) and is put to work in wardrobe before she wins a screen test. Another contest winner, Colleen Moore, arrives in movieland to crash the studio gates and become a star in Ella Cinders (1926). And Marion Davies graduates from custard pie slapstick to movie stardom in a film called Show People (1928).

Although few women were launched into movie careers, this inventory of

jobs as depicted by silent films accurately reflected the growth of a mass consumption economy. But this was as far as movie realism tread and in fact it served to perpetuate fantasy despite the element of satire in several films. By identifying with a heroine in a realistic work situation, moviegoers found themselves proceeding from a plausible starting point to an implausible wish-fulfillment. Not too subtly, one of the films was titled Ella Cinders. An updated version of the fairy tale dictated that the the heroine be rescued from continued employment rather than domestic drudgery.

The number of millionaires and rich men's sons floating on the movie marriage market was enough to turn the head of any young shop girl. Although scarcely knowledgeable about upper class amenities, she was able to bound up the social ladder in a single marriage. The appearance of an elegant, sophisticated, well-bred rival only served to highlight her basic homespun charm and virtues. Irene O'Dare, daughter of an Irish washerwoman, marries Don Marsh, son of a socialite and head of an electrical company. Pink Watson, a PBX operator who covets orchids and ermine, wins the affection of an Oklahoma oil tycoon. Maggie Johnson becomes the best girl of Joe Merrill, son of a millionaire who owns a chain of five-and-dimes. Betty Lou Spence, saucy "It Girl," attracts Cyrus Waltham, head of the world's largest department store. Tessie McGuire, wiser for having been manhandled by playboys, becomes engaged to an old sweetheart who has invented an automotive gadget and promises to support her in style. Chorus girl Orchid Murphy lacks fine manners but appeals to a debonair lover who divides his time between Park Avenue and South America. And Molly Kelly in That Certain Thing marries an heir who, if temporarily estranged from his father, puts her culinary and his capitalistic talents to use.

Films in which the heroine achieved stardom ironically tended to denigrate the pursuit of fame and fortune in lieu of woman's true destiny. Ella Cinders exits from a motion picture career to marry a former boyfriend who is really a rich man's son in disguise. Sue Graham, the extra girl, finally obtains a screen test but gives up any prospects to marry a childhood sweetheart. Later she tells her husband as they screen her test for their son, "Dearest, to hear him call me mama means more than the greatest career I could ever have had." Peggy Pepper, the successful movie queen of Show People, walks out on an extravaganza marriage to her leading man and instead gives a fillip to the career of an ex-boyfriend with whom she is still in love. A woman's responsibility to encourage the employment prospects of her man is also dramatized in Love 'em and Leave 'em, Stage Struck, and That Certain Thing. The heroines in these films possess skills useful in joint ventures with their men but certainly do not upstage them. For instance, Mame encourages the aspirations of her fiance Bill to become a window decorator in Love 'em and Leave 'em, although clearly she is the one who displays the talent for such a career.

For the silent screen working girl, employment was simply a detour en route to the altar. And to the extent that being on the job enhanced her marital prospects, an independent life style reenforced tradition. The so-called "new woman" or flapper could be discerned with respect to personality and style in a few of these films, but she was in the minority compared to the sweetness-and-light heroine typified by Pickford in My Best Girl. Despite her appearance in some flapper roles, Colleen Moore cast as a working girl is a comic ingenue and often a bungling one at that. The Swanson heroines in Manhandled, Stage Struck, and Fine Manners are more modern in temperament but incompetent in coping with their personal or professional problems.

A new breed of woman is observable, however, in characters portrayed by Clara Bow and Louise Brooks, actresses with different personalities but similar in exerting a more overt and unabashed form of sex appeal. But despite some displacement of the Victorian notion that women were asexual creatures, the much touted sexual revolution of the twenties did have a conservative dimension. Shop girls may have defied convention but did so only to achieve the conventional end of marriage. Put another way, women became more sexually available to men but in the process acquired more leverage to manipulate them into matrimony. And in general, there was an objectification of women as bodies associated with commodities available for pleasurable use in a consumer economy.

The flapper a la Fitzgerald was a leisure class phenomenon but her aggressive pattern of behavior was evident in a few of the working girl films.[8] Clara Bow as sexual predator has been described as vivacious, pert, saucy, madcap, restless, rebellious, mischievous, and flirtatious. Vincent Canby rightly labeled her as the auteur of Paramount's famed film, It. A dichotomy between work and play is set up in the opening sequence which takes place in the office of Cyrus Waltham, Jr. (Antonio Moreno). The lettering on the office door reveals the fact that Jr. has only recently supplanted Sr. as head of the world's largest department store. Inside his effeminate friend Monty, who is impervious to work and chatters about the quality of "It" (later defined by Elinor Glyn as that "quality...which draws all others with its magnetic force"), is positioned so that he intermittently obscures a patriarchal bust to the right of the desk. Later as the two men walk about the main floor of the department store, Monty inspects a row of salesgirls, each standing next to a single, plastic, female leg thrust upside down into the air--a mise-en-scene that would provoke any Freudian analyst. According to Monty, the only salesgirl present

who possesses "It" is Betty Lou Spence (Bow), but she has already set her sights on her wealthy and handsome boss. ("Sweet Santa Claus, give me him!") As the film progresses, she plots and schemes, utilizing "It" to full advantage, and finally extracts a proposal. The characteristic Bow heroine, whether a flapper or not, is in perpetual motion in pursuit of her man--almost any man.[9]

Although Bow was spunky and spirited, she was basically good-natured whereas Louise Brooks had a touch of the stereotyped vampire in her rather unique sensual appeal. In Love 'em and Leave 'em, she plays Janie Walsh, a spoiled brat who takes advantage of her older sister Mame's better nature and acquires everything she has, including her boyfriend Bill. When Janie loses the funds collected for a Welfare Dance, she has no compunction about shifting the blame and disgrace to Mame. In the end,she discards Bill, flirts with a middle-aged department store manager, and drives off in a Rolls with the store owner himself. No doubt she is beginning a promising career. If Mame has been too indulgent in rearing her younger sister, she is in other respects competent and mature and proves to be no long-suffering martyr. As Janie becomes increasingly thoughtless, Mame reacts angrily and is probably relieved to be rid of her sibling burden in the end. As for the man between the two sisters, he is overshawdowed by the unscrupulousness of the one and the competence of the other. In a symbolic scene, Bill arrives to rescue Mame in her confrontation with a disreputable bookie concerning the Welfare Dance money lost by Janie. Not only do his pants fall to the floor as he stumbles into the room, his presence is rendered superfluous by Mame who has successfully trussed up the villain in a hide-a-bed. The subsequent reconciliation of the former lovers as they head for the altar at the conclusion of the film thus appears to be a mismatch. Why does Mame need a vascillating and inept male except for the convention that all

women should be marriage bound?

Despite the fact that the silent screen working girl earned her own living for a time, she was conventional in that she usually married and became economically dependent upon a male. A film titled The Eyes of Youth (1919) made a blunt if rare observation in a scene when a discarded wife exclaimed, "I came here to laugh at all these fool women who never stop to think that all they have depends on the whim of some man." Since women in these working girl films had little economic choice besides marriage, obviously the style and object of courtship assumed importance. And when it came to catching a husband, especially a well-heeled one, tactics changed with the heroine. A few "new women" were not the decorous types admired during the Victorian era but were instead aggressively in pursuit of rich husbands. At times, plot devices such as the momentary reversal of a suitor's fortunes intruded to mitigate the heroine's predatory character and to prove that romance triumphs over money. Significantly, the male leads on screen were overshawdowed by the persona of well-known actresses as well as by their respective characterizations. A number of actors in these films were quite anemic in comparison to the swashbuckling Fairbanks, Valentinos, and Barrymores. During a decade when "the little man" became a cog in the wheel of an economy which was standardized yet beyond his comprehension or control, the male image on screen became schizophrenic. As opposed to period pieces in exotic locales where superheroes rescued damsels in distress, men in contemporary settings often paled vis a vis sexually frank or aggressive women. The very fact that vibrant women were paired with such uninspiring lovers is a statement about their destiny: rebelliousness led to marriage with a lacklustre and conventional companion and the maintenance of the status quo.

Were there any movies which portrayed successful women in the professions who remained in control of their own purse strings? Such an alternative was anathema as it meant not conflict between marriage and a career, but no marriage at all. The lesson of a film titled Smouldering Fires (1924) was not to be taken lightly. Unlike most working girl films which are rendered as comedies, Smouldering Fires is a melodrama. Jane Vale, the female lead played by Pauline Frederick, is a middle-aged career woman who has become President and General Manager of a clothing factory built by her father. In the opening sequence of the film, Jane is presiding over a business meeting. She has short, unwaved hair, dresses in a mannish suit with white shirt and tie, and makes emphatic gestures by pounding the table and jabbing her finger in the air. Jane's mottoes are "Be Necessary to Others" and "Let No Man Be Necessary to You." She reproves a flirtatious,blond secretary by inquiring, "Do you girls ever think of anything but clothes and a man to lean on?" And she dominates the men on her staff who ridicule her in private but dare not contravene her in public.

Vale's portrait is drawn in a heavy-handed manner but it gets worse. Enter Robert Elliott, a young factory inspector whose direct and outspoken conduct impresses her. She promotes him to Assistant General Manager. Nothing is wrong with her usual business acumen, but Jane falls in love with her employee like any adoring, young girl and Bob is chivalrous enough to propose. The situation develops into a triangle when Jane's much younger sister Dorothy, played by Laura La Plante, arrives from Bryn Mawr. A vivacious blond, Dorothy is almost immediately drawn to Bobby but is self-sacrificing and alludes to "the first real happiness Jane has ever known--."

Smouldering Fires is a deadly film. According to the plot, a woman cannot successfully pursue a business career without becoming mannish and to be

mannish means in effect to be unloved. The film further implies that a forty year old woman already has one foot in the grave. When Jane and Bobby entertain guests one evening, some young couples engage in frenetic steps on the dance floor. Jane watches from the sidelines and exclaims in despair to her sister: "Oh darling! You're all so young--so young!" Symbolically the original print of Smouldering Fires was tinted in various colors to evoke mood and this scene was dyed a deep red, as was the final scene in which Jane relinquishes her youthful husband to her sister.[10] As stressed by these scenes in red tint, Jane's predicament is shameful and embarassing. She ruins her life by succeeding as a businesswoman and then makes a fool of herself over a younger man. Essentially, she fails as a woman. Vale's name is meaningful in more ways than one.

Although women's work was mostly devalued on celluloid, a few exceptional films such as Miss Lulu Bett (1920) and The Homemaker (1924) dealt with themes stressing the heroine's struggle towards economic independence or self-expression as a legitimate act. Miss Lulu Bett is the simple and moving narrative of a small-town spinster who revolts against family tyranny. The Homemaker features an unusual plot about a role reversal. Significantly, both films were adapted for the screen by women from works written by women: Zona Gale's novel, Miss Lulu Bett, was adapted by Clara Beranger and Dorothy Canfield's novel, The Homemaker, by Mary O'Hara. Also a stage play, Miss Lulu Bett was a minor work directed by William deMille for Famous Players-Lasky which distributed through Paramount.[11] The Homemaker was a production of Universal, a lesser studio of the twenties. Although prints of both films have managed to survive to the present day, neither was a box-office smash in its time. A New York reviewer accurately described The Homemaker as "a serious attempt at domestic naturalism ....a certain number of people will think it splendid...they do not promise,

however, to be numerous...."[12]

Miss Lulu Bett, realistically portrayed by Lois Wilson, is a stereotyped spinster living on sufferance in the tyrannical household of her brother-in-law, Dwight. Earning her keep more as an abused servant than a relation, she is made painfully aware of her dependent status. A bogus marriage which she is forced to abandon provides but a temporary refuge and the realization that marital life in itself is no automatic solution to personal unhappiness. After a series of incidents during which she is further mistreated, Lulu finally erupts in anger, leaves the household, and goes to work in the village bakery. She is then assured of "Life...Liberty...and Pursuit of Happiness" (a relevant quotation in the film's last title)--happiness in the person of a local school teacher named Neil, with whom she has developed a sympathetic understanding.[13]

Miss Lulu Bett was an atypical film because it depicted family life--at least in Dwight's household--as particularly oppressive, marriage as no guarantee of personal fulfillment (after her own aborted marriage, Lulu prevents the elopment of a headstrong and immature niece), and employment as a woman's means of achieving self-reliance. Another heroine who escapes from an unhappy domestic life is Eva Knapp (Alice Joyce), wife and mother of three children in The Homemaker. After thirteen years of marriage, Eva continues to be an efficient housewife: she maintains her modest home in apple pie order, is a superb cook, and artfully sews her children's clothing. Unfortunately, her husband Lester is a bumbling clerk whose $1,800 a year salary obligates her to an endless round of "sewing, scrimping, and scrubbing." Far from receiving an anticipated promotion, Lester is dismissed by a new manager who values efficiency, not seniority. In despair, he even fails at a suicide attempt and

the resulting injury confines him to a wheel chair. This mishap leads to a rare role reversal in which Eva becomes an adept saleswoman and earns $3,000 a year plus a bonus at Lester's former firm.[14] And Lester proves to be a better parent since his fanciful and dreamy nature endears him to his sons and daughter, previously constrained by Eva's qualities as a martinet. If Lester's childlike personality unsuits him for the business world, it enables him to relate to the children whereas Eva's perfectionism proves more advantageous in the sales department than at home.

The uniqueness of the role reversal in The Homemaker is underscored by the film's melodramatic and ridiculous ending. Lester's sudden recovery, prompted by a desperate action to save his daughter during a fire, promises to undo a satisfactory arrangement and disturb the contentment of the entire family. Against the protests of his incredulous doctor, Lester decides to spend the rest of his life as as invalid in a wheel chair so that the role reversal can be sustained. This implausible film ends with the title, "Who is the homemaker? Is it the one who stays home, or the one who goes forth to battle?" Although a more provocative title would have redefined these roles or questioned their assumption on the basis of gender alone, the film was unorthodox in questioning traditional marital relationships and in underlining the importance of work in a woman's life.[15]

Films such as Miss Lulu Bett and The Homemaker were isolated instances in their realistic depiction of the woman's domestic role and their treatment of the subject of work with respect to self-realization. Usually, working girl movies were modernized versions of the Cinderella tale whose moral dictated that the heroine be rescued from work and ensconsed in a romantic marriage. The impact of motion pictures types and their variations repeated ad infinitum for the audience involves the complex phenomenon of stars as

role models.[16] The rise of the star system, a development associated with the spectacular career of Mary Pickford as America's Sweetheart, was based upon the blurring of the line between screen image and everyday life. Movie magazines early capitalized upon the public's curiosity and hunger for details about the lives of the stars--a form of voyeurism which served as an extention of the film-viewing experience itself. Since the viewer was led to identify with an actor or actress, stars provided powerful role models of a type and on a scale which never before existed. Ironically, the female stars who played shop girls intent on being rescued from work were successful and highly paid career women, but the merging of screen persona and a glamorized private life may have served to obfuscate this fact.

Among the facts publicized about movie stars were the astronomical figures of their salaries. Pickford's legendary financial coups, for example, were progressively noted by the press. Although Pickford was an exceptionally astute businesswoman who had a cash-register brain and was the driving force behind United Artists, screen actresses did command sizeable salaries. When Gloria Swanson left Paramount, her last contract negotiations involved figures quoted as high as $20,000 a week. Colleen Moore collected $12,500 a week under the terms of her contract with First National while her rival, Clara Bow, earned $7,500 a week at Paramount. Comedienne Mabel Normand reportedly drew a salary of $10,000 a week at the height of her popularity. Laura La Plante, Universal's leading female star, was grossing $3,500 a week when she decided to abandon her film career. Viola Dana stated in an interview in the early twenties that she spent $50,000 on clothes alone one year. And the story goes that Marion Davies was able to hand William Randolph Hearst a million dollars when his empire suffered a setback in the thirties.[17]

For the movie stars starring in these working girl films, being successful and well-paid woman did not preclude their marrying and often more than once. Gloria Swanson and Pauline Frederick married five times. Mary Pickford, Colleen Moore, Evelyn Brent, and Viola Dana married three times. Laura La Plante married twice. Mabel Normand, Louise Brooks, and Clara Bow married only once. Marion Davies did not marry until her famous thirty-year liaison with Hearst ended with the publisher's death.[18] Admittedly marriages made in tinsel town were hardly conventional, but the fact that actresses repeatedly played out in their personal as well as screen lives the destiny appointed for women undercut the conflicts indicated by Hollywood divorce statistics.

Film historian Iris Barry wrote rather haltingly during the twenties, "We are beginning to realize that a woman who isn't well--I mean who doesn't feel she is doing the best that's in her--inside marriage, is best out of it. But it's hard to get people to admit this, even if they believe it, for 'popular opinion' is against them...."[19] Certainly during the twenties when more and more women were working out of economic necessity if not by choice, movies portrayed them either being rescued from employment by millionaires or giving up careers in favor of marriage. Women's ideal state was matrimony unencumbered by the rigors of remunerative employment. Films thus contradicted the economic realities of urban living in a mass consumption economy and by doing so, helped to perpetuate less than positive attitudes about women working, especially married women. Despite an increase in the number of women employed outside the home, the significance of work in women's lives remained unexplored. Although the material base of women's existence might have served as pre-conditions for attitudinal or even institutional changes in sex roles, the prevailing ideology was proven resistant to change. Unfor-

tunately, the women's movement which today articulates a counter ideology had gone into eclipse in the twenties. And the movie industry, which in that decade became streamlined in production, distribution, and exhibiting,became less open to innovation and increasingly reliant upon formularized plots and characters. Standardization was an effort to ensure box office receipts but it also perpetuated in the audience an acceptance of movie types which discouraged novelty. And types could always be rationalized on the basis that the industry was only giving the public what it demanded as entertainment.

Feminist writers like Shulamith Firestone contend that the greater the technological possibility for woman's emancipation, the greater the necessity for romance to distract woman and subject her to emotional dependence.[20] Although romantic postures prescribed for male and female have been increasingly contradicted by the material base of society, romance endures. As greater use of technology liberates women from sex-typed roles and as women achieve a degree of economic independence, they are subverted by the convention of romantic love. Women are rendered manipulable as love and sex objects, role models purveyed by the mass media, and therefore unable to recognize and deal with the power context of heterosexual relationships. Germaine Greer observes in her incisive analysis of romance as a fantasy which distorts behavior, "Sexual religion is the opiate of the supermenial."[21] Dreams about a romantic Prince Charming still exist in drugstore novels, movies, and television programs as part of a mass communications system geared for a female market. And it is in this respect that the media is retrograde. For if the uses of advanced technology can liberate women, in the form of mass communications it has greater capacity to provide them with ready-made interpretations of their existence and thus distance them from it. During the twenties, working girl movies accom-

plished this alienation with respect to women's work experience by perpetuating Cinderella fantasies. It remains to be seen whether in our technological future, women themselves can devise a new cinema which will enrich rather than rigidify their lives.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Portions of this article are based on research which appears in: VIRGINS, VAMPS, AND FLAPPERS: THE AMERICAN SILENT MOVIE HEROINE By Sumiko Higashi, Copyright Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., Canada, 1978. By permission.

[2]A significant theoretical problem which whould be addressed is the question of whether or not there is an interface between historical methods of research, which are empirical, and structuralist film theory, which is ahistorical and applicable to any filmic text regardless of social context.

[3]Hunter, Dulin and Co., The Golden Harvest of the Silver Screen (Los Angeles: Hunter, Dulin and Co., 1927), pp. 7, 24.

[4]See standard works on the twenties such as William E. Leuchtenburg's Perils of Prosperity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday (New York: Bantam Books, 1959; copyrighted 1931); Mark Sullivan's Our Times (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933, Vol.V); and Malcolm Cowley's Exile Return (New York: Viking Press, 1951). For a reevaluation of the twenties, see Roderick Nash's The Nervous Generation (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1970).

[5]Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, Recent Social Trends in the United States (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1933), pp.711-35; United States Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States (1916), pp. 243-54; Statistical Abstract (1924), p. 57; Statistical Abstract (1933) p. 67; Mary Ross, "Shall We Join the Gentlemen?" Survey, LVII (December 1, 1926), 265-66; William H. Chafe, The American Woman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Chs. 2, 3, 4; W. Elliott Brownlee and Mary M. Brownlee, Women in the American Economy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), Introduction.

[6]For the contemporary literature about the domestic problems of the working woman, see the issue of Survey published in December, 1925. The entire issue was devoted to the subject of women and work. Also see Recent Social Trends and Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd's Middletown (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1929).

[7]Robert L. Dickinson and Laura Beam, The Single Woman: A Medical Study in Sex Education (New York: Reynal and Hitchcook, Inc., 1934), p. 351.

[8]The movie flapper, unlike Fitzgerald's models, was for reasons of censorship if nothing else, quite spirited in behavior but very conventional in her moral standards. See The Plastic Age , Our Dancing Daughters, Our Modern Maidens, Wine of Youth.

[9]Despite her being dubbed the "It Girl" after It, Bow played flapper roles proper in films such as Black Oxen, The Plastic Age, and Dancing Mothers, all dated prior to It.

[10]Kevin Browlow, The Parades Gone By (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), p. 330.

[11]Unlike his more famous brother Cecil B., who discovered that biblical spectaculars meant big business, William made a series of simple pictures stressing human interest. Also interesting to note is that deMille was married to Clara Beranger. Interview with Lois Wilson, New York City, November 24,1972. Telephone conversation with Agnes deMille, New York City, October 19, 1972.

[12]The Homemaker, clipping file, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles (hereafter cited as AMPAS).

[13]The plot resolution of the novel is not as forceful as that of the film since Neil, a music man with poor prospects rather than a respected school teacher, proposes to Lulu as she is about to leave town in search of employment. The film version is less subtle in detailing Lulu's character but stronger in outlining her rebellion and quest for independence.

[14]These salary figures were realistic. According to the Lynd's study of Middletown, "the minimum cost of living for a 'standard family of five' in Middletown in 1924 was $1,920.87." (pp. 84-85.) A study of the American Association of Business and Professional Women disclosed that one-fourth of the women in clerical and publicity work and in teaching positions in 1927 earned less than $1,213 annually; one-half less than $1,548; and three-fourths less than $2,004. (Recent Social Trends in the United States, p. 736.)

[15]An article about role reversal in Time queried, "how many men have actually agreed to swap the daily commuter train for domesticity? Report Time correspondents nationwide: a very scant, very hardy few." Sheldon Schacter, one of the few, related: "At first I just lolled around the house, doing chores, watching soap operas, and growing lonesome. I found myself waiting for Sandy to come home as the highlight of the day. There was a dependency starting to build up in me." ("Men of the House," Time, February 18, 1974, p. 76.) Apparently separate functions are not necessarily equal and this may account for the scarcity of role reversal even today.

[16]James Monaco, How to Read a Film (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 217-27.

[17]Clipping files and scrapbooks, non-catalogued, listed under names of the stars, Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, New York City, and AMPAS.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Iris Barry, Let's Go to the Movies (New York: Payson and Clarke, Ltd., 1926), p. 65.

[20]See The Dialectic of Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 146-47. Also see Germaine Greer's discussion of romance in The Female Eunuch (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 179-99. Stendhal remarked in his inimitable style that woman would become man's rival instead of companion "as soon as you have abolished love by law." (On Love, trans, H.B.V. under the direction of C.K. Scott-Moncrieff, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967, pp. 228-30.) See Simone de Beauvoir's study of Stendhal, "Stendhal or the Romantic of Reality" in The Second Sex (trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, New York: Bantam Books, 1961, pp.223-37.)

[21]Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) pp. 197.

FILMOGRAPHY

Ella Cinders. John McCormick Productions. Dist. First National. Dir. Alfred E. Green, 1926.

The Extra Girl. Mack Sennett Productions. Dist. Associated Exhibitors. Dir. F. Richard Jones, 1923.

The Eyes of Youth. Equity. Dir. Albert Parker, 1919.

Fine Manners. Paramount. Dir. Richard Rossen, 1926.

The Homemaker. Universal. Dir. King Baggott, 1925.

Irene. First National. Dir. Alfred E. Green, 1926.

It. Famous Players-Lasky. Dist. Paramount. Dir. Frank Tuttle, 1926.

Love 'em and Leave 'em. Fampus Players-Lasky. Dist. Paramount. Dir. Frank Tuttle, 1926.

Manhandled. Famous Players-Lasky. Dist. Paramount, Dir. Allan Dwan, 1924.

Mantrap. Famous Players-Lasky. Dist. Paramount. Dir. Victor Fleming, 1926.

Miss Lulu Bett. Famous Players-Lasky, Dist. Paranount. Dir. William deMille, 1921.

My Best Girl. Mary Pickford Corp. Dist. United Artists. Dir. Sam Taylor, 1927.

Orchids and Ermine. John McCormick Productions. Dist. First National. Dir. Alfred Santell, 1926.

Show People. MGM. Dir. King Vidor, 1928.

Smouldering Fires. Universal, Dir. Clarence Brown, 1924.

Stage Struck. Famous Players-Lasky. Dist. Paramount. Dir. Allan Dwan, 1925.

That Certain Thing. Columbia, Dir. Frank Capra, 1928.